FHWA’s Office of Project Development and Environmental Review develops and implements programs and activities that accelerate project delivery and improve the environmental review process for FHWA funded projects.

The Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty offers research opportunities to improve transportation decision making and promote efficiency while protecting communities and the environment. The Office supports and conducts research that:

- Informs Decisions
- Reduces Environmental Impacts
- Enhances Quality of Life
- Accelerates Project Delivery
- Advances Transportation Planning

Research Focus

The Office’s research efforts focus on improving the NEPA process to accelerate transportation decision making and improve environmental outcomes. Research projects study how to protect the environment while meeting the public's need for safe, efficient transportation improvements. Research topics include:

- Accelerating project delivery
- Programmatic approaches
- Improving the quality of environmental documents
- Threatened and endangered species
- Water quality
- Historic preservation

The Office’s research seeks to identify methods to help FHWA stakeholders effectively evaluate project and program impacts and identify, improve, and implement sound mitigation options.

The Office aims to improve coordination and communication between State departments of transportation (DOTs), partner agencies, and the public to ensure project understanding and create new efficiencies.

Staff Contact: Susan Jones, 202-493-2139.

FEATURED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Interagency NEPA & Permitting Collaboration Tool (INPCT)

INPCT is a new web-based collaboration tool designed to aid NEPA practitioners to efficiently manage the environmental review and permitting processes for all types of transportation projects. The tool can help strengthen interagency collaboration during the NEPA process by making it easier for project managers, environmental planners, and resource and regulatory agency staff to exchange documents and collect and share comments in real time. INPCT centralizes the many elements of a NEPA review to help manage the decision-making process. For more information, visit the INPCT website.

Staff Contacts: David Williams, 202-366-4074 and Megan Cogburn, 202-366-2056.
Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)
Virtual public involvement enhances and broadens the reach of public engagement efforts including considerations and strategies for engaging traditionally underserved communities. It makes participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable. When used in combination with traditional public involvement strategies, virtual tools provide increased transparency and access to transportation planning activities and project development and decision-making processes. FHWA is developing case studies and fact sheets and facilitating peer exchanges to help transportation agencies implement VPI. For more information, visit FHWA’s Virtual Public Involvement website.

Staff Contact: Lana Lau, 202-366-2052 and Carolyn Nelson, 202-860-6173.

Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL)
PEL represents a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that 1) considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and 2) uses the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process. FHWA has generated fact sheets, trainings, case studies and state-of-the-practice studies to further advance the application of PEL. For more information, visit the PEL website.

Staff Contact: Marisel Lopez-Cruz, 407-867-6402.

Stochastic Empirical Loading and Dilution Model (SELDM)
FHWA and the U.S. Geological Survey developed SELDM to replace FHWA’s 1990 “Driscoll” stormwater runoff model. SELDM calculates probability that established water quality criteria is higher with or without user-defined best management practices (BMPs). SELDM also calculates annual runoff loads, can analyze annual lake-loading analysis, and includes national data sets for highway-runoff water. SELDM transforms complex scientific data into meaningful information about adverse effects risks of runoff on receiving waters and potential mitigation measures and their potential effectiveness. For more information, visit the Stochastic Empirical Loading and Dilution Model website.

Staff Contact: Susan Jones, 202-493-2139.

Eco-Logical
The Eco-Logical approach is a nine-step framework that sets forth a process to identify and integrate transportation and ecological priorities for infrastructure and conservation decision-making. By fostering collaboration, the Eco-Logical approach reduces the time and cost of meeting environmental regulations while maximizing the avoidance of resources and leading to better environmental outcomes.

Staff Contact: David Williams, 202-366-4074.